



It's a business unlike any other. It's like a breath of fresh air and here it's really easy to find what you're looking for. It's the kind of business where it's just plain fun. Here you decide if you want to leave quickly (because you will be attended right away) or if you would like to stay a little longer (because you like the homey feeling). Kok Optica is that kind of place. This year is a very special one for the family business, as Kok Optica is celebrating its 20th birthday.

Frans and Alexandra Kok are siblings who jointly run the five Kok Optica stores. "But it all started with my parents. They are part and parcel of our business. They instilled in us the important things. The way they raised us defines who we are and what we stand for." The Kok family is greatly attached to their business and mother and father Kok still faithfully come each day to the office to help run the business. "They are our own Board of Directors", Alexandra jokes. Together with their brother Rudolph, there are five members of the Kok family who run five stores: the main optical store on Wilhelminastraat and the four sunglass stores, two of which are in Oranjestad, one at the Paseo Herencia Mall and one at the airport.

June 1, 1996

Frans still remembers the opening day as if it were yesterday. "It was June 1, 1996 and it was extremely busy the whole day. It was really a great day." It's funny how Frans and his sister entered the profession, because for both of them it wasn't their first choice right away. "My father was an optician and he worked at an optical store. At the time, I had no clue what career I wanted to pursue, so he

suggested I entered his profession. I still remember what I was thinking: 'OK, let's try this than'", Frans laughs. He studied at the same school in Rotterdam as his father, as did his sister Alexandra afterwards. "For my father, it was an emotional time to return to his old school with me, especially when Alexandra also followed suit. We followed in his footsteps." Like Frans, his sister Alexandra returned to Aruba after completing her degree. "I had no choice, because I got a one-way ticket", she jokes. To Frans it was clear he wanted to start his own business after completing his degree. "I had a lot of ideas and I really wanted to be innovative. At the time, my mother and my brother spotted the building on Wilhelminastraat. When I saw the building, I thought it was about to fall down. People weren't living there for years and the neighborhood didn't have such a good reputation. Besides, these old traditional Aruban houses have only 4 different rooms, how were we going to put the collections in there?" However, the positive attitude of his mother and his brother paid off and now, 20 years later, it's this building that characterizes Kok Optica. The recently opened sunglass store is situated in the old Chez Matilda building, where in the past the Kok family has lived. "Our philosophy is to restore things and to stimulate and support the local economy as much as possible."

The collections then and now

From the beginning, it's very clear that Kok Optica targets the fashion trends. Frans thinks it's important that the latest models are available. "That's our strong point and from the beginning a unique selling point. People know that at our stores they'll find a collection that's up-to-date. Aruba may be small,

yet people love the latest trends." In the past glasses were small, nowadays the frames stand out and they are big. "People are becoming more daring and Kok Optica follows this trend. We encourage our customers to move with the times. That way, you set the tone." Not only are the size and the striking colors different than before, the purpose of wearing glasses is also different. Frans: "We know children who cry when it turns out they don't need glasses after an eye exam. Glasses have become a fashion item and nowadays people even buy glasses without prescription, just for the look." This is true if you look around in the showcases, because there are models ranging from flamboyant and fancy brands to classic, simple frames. "I always say: There is at least one pair of glasses for any person."

The next 20 years

After 20 years, a question that bears asking is how are the next 20 years going to be like. And the answer is very promising. Frans: "We will stay up-to-date with the fashion trends and we will keep our commitment to service. Twenty years ago I never thought we would have 5 stores, so you never know what tomorrow brings." Alexandra adds that Kok Optica wants to go the extra mile in terms of service. "My mother says that you need to treat everyone the same way you want to be treated. Make the most of what's important to you."

Kok Optica

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